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800 Georgia Southwestern State University Drive
Americus, Georgia 31709-4376

Division of University Relations / Office of Public Relations *phone* (229) 931-2028 *fax* (229) 931-2072

For more information, contact: Stephen E Snyder
(229) 931-2037 or ssnyder@canes.gsw.edu

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GSW first institution nationwide to offer Caregiving Specialist Certificate Program

AMERICUS--In the fall of 2007, Georgia Southwestern State University (GSW) will become the first university in the nation to offer a certificate program specifically focused on training leaders to overcome "the caregiving crisis" in America. The 18-credit Caregiving Specialist Certificate Program includes courses in psychology, nursing, special education and sociology, as well as a community practicum and leadership training.

"We are taking this step to address what is widely regarded as an emerging crisis in America: in short, we do not have the workers or leaders in place to provide quality care to the large number of individuals who require support to remain in the community," said Richard Birkel, executive director of the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving (RCI). "These individuals include people living with chronic illness and disability of all ages, as well as individuals who require assistance because of aging."

The RCI worked in conjunction with University faculty to develop the curriculum for the Certificate Program. In addition, the University and RCI are working together to develop additional programs to train leaders in long-term, home and community-based care at the graduate and mid-career levels.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts a 45 percent increase in demand for new long-term care workers between 2000 and 2010, alone, the equivalent of approximately 800,000 new jobs.

"There's a tremendous workforce shortage in caregiving professions, and this will become an even bigger problem as baby boomers retire," said Birkel. The RCI considers the workforce shortage to be a crisis situation.

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“Every community today needs leaders who can develop systems of care including home visiting, respite, counseling, stress management and access to the most effective caregiver supports, and they have to do this with significant limits on available funds; that is the focus of our training and leadership development,” added Birkel.

The number of individuals in our society requiring personal assistance due to ill health, chronic conditions and disabilities is at an historic level and growing. However, the number of individuals in our society available and trained to provide this assistance (caregivers) has not kept pace with the need.

Georgia Southwestern State University hopes to educate a group of individuals who have the skills and knowledge to address the growing crisis in the workforce and offer students a unique leadership program not available at other universities. The initial group of students the Caregiving Specialist Certificate Program for the 2007-08 school year includes four freshman and four upper-class students in Psychology, Nursing, Education and pre-Medicine. Classes begin August 14.